

Measles Fact Sheet

Measles is a highly contagious rash illness caused by a virus.

Though measles is relatively rare in the United States, it remains a leading cause of death among young children worldwide. Measles is usually thought of as a childhood disease, but people of any age can get it. Complications of measles include diarrhea, otitis media (inflammation of the middle ear), pneumonia (lung infection), encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), seizures, and death. Complications are most common in children younger than 5 years of age and adults 20 years of age and older.

Measles is spread from person-to-person by airborne droplets and direct contact with infected respiratory secretions.

The highly contagious virus can be found in the air after someone who is infected with measles coughs or sneezes. The virus can also be spread by direct contact with infected nasal or throat secretions. The virus can remain contagious on surfaces for up to 2 hours. A person can spread measles from 4 days before to 4 days after the rash develops. Anyone with measles should not attend childcare, school, work, or other public places until they are no longer contagious.

Symptoms to look for include:

- Rash that starts on the face and neck and then spreads. The rash fades in the order in which it appears.
- High fever
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes
- Cough (sometimes like Croup)
- Small red spots, with blue and white centers inside the mouth (Koplik spots)

Symptoms such as fever, cough, and watery eyes may occur within 8 to 12 days after exposure. It usually takes 14 days (range 7-18 days) after exposure to develop a rash.

Laboratory testing is needed to confirm a measles infection.

People who think they have measles should contact a doctor or local health department **immediately** to be tested. Measles is diagnosed by a history of exposure to the disease, symptoms, and laboratory testing of the blood.

There is no specific treatment for measles.

Care of patients with measles consists mainly of providing good nutrition and fluids. Antibiotics may be prescribed for treating eye or ear infections, and acetaminophen (Tylenol) for fever.

A person in close contact with someone who has measles should be notified of the exposure, determine if they are susceptible to getting measles, and treated if necessary. Vaccine given within 72 hours of measles exposure may provide protection from developing measles in some cases. Treatment with a product called Immune Globulin (IG) may prevent measles if given within 6 days of exposure. Check with your doctor or local health department for advice. Close contacts may include:

- Persons who live in the same house;
- Persons who have done medical treatments such as mouth-to-mouth resuscitation or intubation;
- Close social contacts in child and daycare settings, schools, work, or extracurricular activities; or
- Persons who were exposed during travel to countries in which measles is endemic.

Measles can be prevented with a measles vaccine.

2 doses of measles vaccine are recommended for children starting at 12 to 15 months of age. The vaccine is given as part of the measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine. A 2nd dose of measles vaccine, usually given as MMR vaccine, is now required for all Maryland school children in Kindergarten through Grade 12. The 2nd dose may be given at any age at least 4 weeks after the 1st dose. Women should not get the vaccine if they are pregnant or plan to get pregnant within 4 weeks after getting the vaccine. For additional information about measles vaccine, please visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/Pubs/vis/default.htm>.